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Inservice education programs for public school teachers are needed for these, among other, reasons: (1) to provide teachers with preparation for teaching reading since this often not done by colleges and universities and is often not required for state department certification; (2) to help teachers keep abreast of the latest research in the field of reading; and (3) to help teachers evaluate the vast amount of new materials available. The paramount consideration in providing an effective inservice education program is the teachers for whom it is established. Therefore, meeting times, selections of topics to be covered, and methods used to present these topics should be decided with teachers in mind if the program is to meet their needs. Inservice programs can be conducted by the inservice educator employed by the school system or by university personnel obtained on a consultant basis. One reference is noted. (MD)

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INSERVICE EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS

INTRODUCTION

In this paper I will discuss three general aspects of inservice education for teachers in the area of reading. In the first topic I will state the reasons why I feel inservice education programs are needed in reading. This will be followed by a discussion of some rather specific of some rather specific factors to consider in developing an inservice program. For the third aspect, I will deal with some possible approaches for providing help for classroom teachers.

NEED FOR INSERVICE EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN READING

To Gain the Basic Knowledge About How To Teach Reading

Many elementary and most secondary teachers begin their first year of teaching without having had a single three semester hour course in the teaching of reading. By way of contrast, 36 semester hours of course work are required for persons to be certified to teach in the health program recently mandated for New York State. Not to denigrate the necessity for adequately trained personnel in the health field but it would seem obvious that reading is a basic skill essential for adequate performance in any academic area and that preparation for teaching reading is at least as important as preparation for teaching health. Therefore, hours of course work in reading education should be a required part of any elementary teacher certification program.

I am reminded of an article that appeared in the January 1969 Phi Delta Kappan[1] in which Dr. S. Alan Cohen thoroughly chastised public educators, both urban and suburban, for a, ... "50 year gap between know-how and practice..." He stated further that, ..."teachers were ignorant of basic principles, of phonetics, phonemics, and phonics and were even unfamiliar with the pedogogy outlined in the teacher's manuals of the basal readers they were using in their classrooms." I see little excuse for a lack of knowledge about the pedogogy outlined in the teacher's manuals but I wonder where he thinks teachers will learn about "the principles of phonetics, phonemics, and phonics?" It's been my observation that the "teaching pedogogy" of teachers is largely a reflection of the inadequate educational experience that they have had in colleges and universities. This is a result of the fact that

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many teachers have had only a brief introduction to the teaching of reading as an 8-week experience in some general education course called "Language Arts Methods." I agree with Dr. Cohen about the need for improved pedogogy. I am hopeful that more colleges and universities will begin to assume responsibility for providing instruction in the teaching of reading for students they recommend for certification and further that they will set some worthy models for undergraduate or graduate students alike to follow in their practices after they leave our institutions of higher education. After all, hasn't the field of educational psychology made clear the role imitation plays in behavior shaping?

Recognizing the obvious bias of educators with specialization in reading, one can't help but wonder what perspectives Deans of Schools of Education have when they approve masters degree programs in elementary education that contain not a single three semester hour course in the teaching of reading. What do these "educators" think happens in an elementary classroom? Don't they realize that in the primary grades at least 50% of the teacher's time is spent in teaching reading or in having the students apply reading skills?

Recently the requests have been mounting for providing black studies programs on our campuses. A university official stated the case rather well when he said that we should concentrate first on providing students with the basic skills lest they get the black study centers and not be able to read the books. The question that seems to follow is, how can the public schools be expected to provide even the basic skills when they have teachers entering the profession by the thousands with no training in the teaching of reading?

The burden of responsibility for providing and/or demanding at least minimal training in reading for classroom teachers appears to rest at the present time squarely on the shoulders of public school personnel. For all school systems, obtaining qualified classroom teachers is a serious problem. By qualified is meant, a teacher with the necessary background to program a group of children for success in reading. The immediate solution for public school administrators is either to hire people qualified to provide the necessary inservice education for their teachers or to contract with outside agencies, usually college and university personnel, for this help. A long term solution to the problem would seem to rest upon the Schools of Education and State Departments of Education assuming a more aggressive role in promoting more pre-service reading education for all teachers.

To Keep Abreast of Research

In addition to the need for inservice education to overcome the lack of an adequate program of basic preparation in reading as discussed above, classroom teachers need help in keeping abreast of research in the field of reading. At no time in the past has educational research been undertaken on such a broad scale as during the last 10 years.

Teachers need help in assessing new methods of teaching reading. Such innovations as individually prescribed instruction, linguistically oriented reading programs and the multitude of approaches to total school as well as classroom grouping all require a careful evaluation of each innovation by the classroom teacher in the light of his students, his goals, his methods of operation and the resources available in his school district. This does not imply that school administrators do not provide help for the classroom teachers in pondering some of these factors but the fact remains that reading is just one part of the school curriculum and the administrator may or may not have a firm grasp of what a sound reading program should contain. The person presuming to provide inservice training for teachers in the area of new teaching methods will need to be adept at reviewing research studies; sorting out information relevant to that particular method and communicating this information in an understandable fashion. Alerting teachers to other teachers, either within or outside their own district, who are using a new method can help in providing them with an accurate appraisal of a new approach.

In like manner, teachers need to be kept apprised of new mediums for providing reading instruction. Such mediums as the initial teaching alphabet and computer assisted instruction are currently relatively new and generating a good deal of controversy as to their value. Teachers should be presented with the pros and cons of any program they might be expected to use and whatever supporting evidence there is for either side of the argument.

To Keep Abreast of New Materials

A number of attempts are made to acquaint teachers with what materials and equipment are available for teaching reading. Exhibits of materials and equipment are provided at conferences, such as the C.R.A. and at state and local teachers' conventions but these are not enough. First of all, not all teachers avail themselves of these exhibits and second,

those that do are generally overwhelmed at the abundance of materials and equipment and find it difficult in the limited time available to determine which materials will be most useful for the specific needs of the children in their own classroom. Relying on the words of sales representatives is certainly not adequate. In the final analysis, it is usually only through trying the materials herself that a classroom teacher can form a valid judgment.

Obtaining a clear picture of why the materials were developed and for what population, can aid the teacher in making intelligent decisions about how she might best employ them with her students. A partial answer to this dilemma can be provided by the person charged with providing inservice education (the inservice educator). He can help teachers to ask the right questions. The teacher must learn to inquire as to what evidence is available that indicates that a particular program really does what it purports to do. To do this, she will need clear statements of the purpose of the program from its author plus any research evidence available. The teacher and tne inservice educator will need to jointly work through the assessment of programs, the teacher is considering using, to determine their value.

It is easy to find examples of where this is not being done. One needs only look at schools which have adopted the Frostig Program or the Michigan Visual Tracking program for all children. These are programs that were developed for children with specialized problems related to reading and were never intended for mass use by all children.

One may reasonably ask at this point why would a principal allow these programs to be implemented for all children in his school? The answer lies in the fact that we are coming more and more to recognize that we have educators in our schools and we have administrators in our schools and the expectation that one individual can be both is questionable. The profusion of materials available in reading today makes it imperative, therefore, that we have high quality inservice education programs to provide guidance for both classroom teachers and building principals in the selection and implementation of new programs.

As stated earlier, one of the best ways of evaluating materials is by actually using them. The inservice educator should alert classroom teachers as well as building principals to the opportunity that exists with some companies of obtaining packaged kits of materials on a

trial basis free of charge. The practice, that came into existance in some schools at the same time as the influx of federal funds, of making cursory appraisals of materials based largely on the word-of-mouth reporting by sales representatives has led to much irresponsible misuse of these funds. Numerous examples of this practice can be seen in schools in deprived areas where the shiny new kits and mechanical devices sit on the shelves collecting dust. Obtaining sample kits on a trial basis should procede the purchase of such kits whenever possible, since these kits can run as high as several hundred and in some cases thousands of dollars.

One method of comparing new materials with those already in use in the school system is for the materials from a new program to be used on a trial basis in two or more classrooms with the publisher furnishing the materials free of charge. The inservice educator should be aware of this possibility to determine the new program's worth. Implicit in this statement is the assumption that the pertinent variables will be considered in advance and accounted for in such a manner as to leave the experimental variable, as nearly as possible, the principal difference between the groups.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER IN DEVELOPING THE INSERVICE PROGRAM

The first consideration in setting up an inservice training program for teachers is to obtain the full cooperation of the building principal and any other pertinent administrators. The contributions of guidance personnel, school psychologist, nurses and others who have systematic contact with children can be significant when their cooperation is obtained and they are carefully programmed into the inservice education program.

Any inservice education program must be based on the assumption that each teacher wants to facilitate the maximum amount of growth possible for each child. The inservice program in reading is no exception to this tenet.

Teachers generally gall into one of three groups. The first group is made up of dedicated, hardworking professionals who put in the extra effort necessary to provide the best possible educational experiences for each child. The second group is made up of that large middle sector of the teaching population who "care" and want to do the right thing but just "don't know how." This is due primarily to the reasons mentioned earlier, i.e. lack of proper preparation. The third group is made of what I shall term "deadwood."

These are the individuals for whom teaching is a job, a way of making a living as easily as possible and little else. Thankfully, this group is only a tiny percentage of most school faculties.

Regardless of which group a teacher is in, the inservice education program can be a meaningful experience. The teachers in the first group will find inservice education an opportunity to keep abreast of what is new in the field and will find support and reinforcement for the excellent things they are already doing. The second group will find through a good inservice program, the knowledge to augment their "good intentions" and hopefully become group one teachers. The teachers in the third group may be sparked by the high level experiences provided by the inservice programs and may very well take on many of the desirable characteristics of the first group. Regardless of which group the teachers fall into, they are the best we have and it is the responsibility of the inservice education program to try and make them better.

SCHEDULING INSERVICE MEETINGS

If inservice training meetings are important enough to hold, then there should be time in the school day set aside for these meetings. Before and after school meetings are always an inconvenience. This does not mean that an occasional before or after school meeting is unreasonable but merely that planning a total inservice education program on a before-and-after school basis is a dubious practice.

There are a number of possible solutions to this dilemma. One such solution is to plan a number of half-day meetings staggered throughout the school year. Most of these could be planned on an individual school basis so that it would not mean bussing all children in a system on any given day. A second possibility is to obtain volunteer parents to act as resource people. With proper preplanning, these parents could provide valuable educational experiences for children during the time teachers were freed for the inservice training program.

A cardinal rule in developing an inservice training program for teachers is to schedule meetings at a time that is convenient for those who are to participate. As stated above these meetings should be planned during school hours, if possible. All inservice education meetings should be planned and announced well in advance. Refreshments should be served at these meetings whenever possible. They will aid in developing a positive attitude on the part of participants.

A key factor in the success of any inservice education program is to make attendance at these meetings voluntary whenever possible. This insures an interested group that are there because they want to be.

If after school meetings are unavoidable, I prefer small informal gatherings where the group is of a size that permits an easy flow of discussion. In a large district, the inservice educator can arrange the meetings at various schools with the selected topic chosen by the teachers of that school. A final comment about scheduling meetings. That is, be ready to meet teachers, principals, and others interested in reading at their convenience.

The timing of specific inservice training topics can be a crucial factor. It is imperative that these meetings, like the educational experiences provided for children, should meet a felt need. There are a variety of ways of finding out what problems, with respect to teaching reading, are most important to the teachers involved. What any specific group of teachers will see as needs, in terms of inservice education help, will be determined in part by their particular backgrounds.

Any approach that works to help the inservice educator to identify teacher needs should be used. Some approaches that have been used successfully are as follows: a questionnaire technique to assist one in identifying topics of concern to teachers. The questionnaire can be structured to illicite responses to some specific areas but should be relatively open ended so that teachers can write in other topics on which they would like help. Another approach that works well in finding out what teachers are thinking is through informal contacts with teachers. By listening when teachers are discussing their problems, one can them plan programs to help them better deal with these problems. A third valuable source for identifying topics of interest to teachers is the feedback obtained from principals, reading teachers, guidance counselors, school psychologists and others who come in contact with teachers.

As stated above the timing of the meeting is most important. Early fall meetings can be profitably planned around such topics as individual evaluation of students and classroom grouping procedures. Most teachers, particularly first year teachers, are interested in exploring these two aspects of reading early in the school year. In the late fall or shortly after the first of the year, prior to the preparation of budgets, a meeting or two can be planned to acquaint the teachers with materials. An excellent source for some of these meetings can be a teacher within the district who is currently using these materials. She can be helpful in discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the materials and in helping other teachers to decide about them for their own use.

Most schools utilize group standardized achievement tests to assess their progress in reading. These can be used as motivating devices for percipitating interests in inservice training topics. Areas found to be weak on the tests such as vocabulary, word study skills, etc. can serve as topics for meaningful inservice training meetings.

The best possible approach to setting up inservice training meetings, of course, is to have the teachers themselves request a specific topic. Such topics as determining the readability level of a specific book, teaching critical reading to specific groups of children, etc. when they come as requests from teachers can serve as meaningful springboards for expanding the teacher's knowledge of reading.

METHODS OF PROVIDING HELP FOR TEACHERS

Demonstrations: One of the most productive methods of providing help for teachers in reading is to demonstrate in the teacher's own classroom. Both testing and teaching techniques lend themselves well to demonstrations. A recent audio-visual aid that facilitates demonstrations for large numbers of teachers is the video-tape recorder. This can be used both as a learning device and as a teacher self-appraisal device.

Case Conference: The case conference approach can be a meaningful learning experience when properly managed. It brings together the team who have contact with the individual child being studied, i.e. the school psychologist, the guidance counselor, school nurse, reading teacher, etc. This provides an opportunity for the group to share in the appraisal of the child under question. It then becomes a matter of bringing this information together to form a meaningful picture of the child. This experience gives the classroom teacher a chance to take an indepth look at a specific child. The hope being, of course, that the teacher will begin to look carefully at other children with an eye to understanding the nature of each child's learning style.

Lecture Approach: The lecture method of disseminating information to groups of teachers is one of the most efficient methods. The caution in using the lecture method, however, is that it can be of questionable value when used as the sole medium.

Group Discussion: The group discussion approach to common problems tends to involve the teacher more intimately and in turn tends to be one of the best ways of handling inservice training topics. It stimulates thinking on the part of the teacher and forces her into an active role in the meeting. It provides her with a broader perspective on a problem than she can obtain in her own classroom.

WHO SHOULD PROVIDE INSERVICE EDUCATION FOR TEACHERS?

There are two general sources from which to obtain individuals to provide inservice education for teachers. One of these is the specialist within the school system; the second is the university professor. The advantages of having the specialist within the school providing the inservice education include the fact that he knows the teacher's needs, the school's goals and the school's resources better than someone from the outside. However, he lacks the aura of the outside expert. The old adage of a prophet being without honor in his own land seems pertinent here. The university professor on the other hand does have the aura of the outside expert and he often has information with respect to the latest research results more readily available. However, his knowledge of the school personnel, their needs, goals, resources, etc., is obviously not as complete as someone who is a regular member of the school staff.

SUMMARY

Inservice education programs for public school teachers are needed for a variety of reasons. First, many of the teachers have had little or no formal preparation in the teaching of reading. This is because many state departments do not require courses in the teaching of reading for certification and thus many colleges and universities either do not offer such courses or do not require them of their degree candidates. The second reason for establishing inservice education programs for teachers is to help teachers keep abreast of the latest research in the field of reading. The third reason is to help teachers evaluate the vast amount of new materials available.

There are a variety of factors that must be considered in providing an effective inservice education program. The paramount consideration is the teachers for whom the program is established. They should be considered in the time the meetings will be held, the selection of topics to be covered and the methods used to present the topics. A successful program meets felt needs of teachers.

Two sources are available for providing inservice help. The first is the inservice educator employed by the school system and the second is university personnel obtained on a consultant basis.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Cohen, S. Alan. "Local Control and the Cultural Deprivation Fallacy," Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. L, No. 5, (January 1969), pp. 255-259.